

Foodborne illness is a serious public health threat. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), each year in the United States 76 million people suffer from vomiting and diarrhea caused by foodborne illness, 325,000 people are hospitalized, and 5,000 die from eating food contaminated with disease-causing organisms. Environmental Health Services' goal is to reduce the risk of foodborne illness through education and strong, community-supported regulation.

**Inspection Program:** Directed by the King County Board of Health food code, Environmental Health serves almost 10,000 permanent and temporary food service operations by providing food worker training, facility inspections, and annual educational visits. Food service establishment inspection reports are posted on our website ([www.metrokc.gov/health/foodsfty](http://www.metrokc.gov/health/foodsfty)), where in 2003, 50,000 visitors each month accessed restaurant inspection histories and home food safety information.

**“Air, water, and food are so basic to human life yet some of the time we take a healthy environment for granted. I think Environmental Health should be on the top of everyone’s list of what is important.”**

*Willie Allen, Coordinator – Food Worker Card Training, Food & Facility Protection Program, 12 years*

A unique service of the food protection program, one of only two in the nation, requires Environmental Health to oversee the retail handling of meat, poultry, rabbit, aquatic foods, and fish. Inspectors ensure that these products sold in King County stores are handled according to safe food standards and properly labeled with packaging date, sell date, product name, and ingredients.

**FDA Standardization:** In 2005, Washington will adopt a new food code based on the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) 2001 Model Food Code. In preparation, Environmental Health was the first local health district in Washington to have a Certified Training Officer (CTO) to institute inspection standardization, focusing on consistent application of laws, regulations, policies, and procedures. The CTO trains each inspector to consistently apply the FDA food safety inspection standards for evaluating the risks of foodborne illness from the food handling process.

**“I love educating people about safe food handling... I love it as much today as I did when I started 32 years ago.”**

*Perry Lee, Health & Environmental Investigator, Food & Facility Protection Program, 32 years*

**Food Worker Training Partnership:** Food workers in Washington need a Food Worker Card that is provided after taking and passing a food safety class and test. More than 55,000 cards are issued in King County each year. In order to facilitate training these tens of thousands of workers, we partnered with the Washington Restaurant Association Education Foundation. Through this partnership, professionals certified in food safety practices teach the Food Worker Card class and proctor the test. The classes may be held at the food establishment, offering an excellent environment for food workers to immediately apply safe food practices in the kitchen where they work. More than 20,000 food workers received their cards through this program in 2003. For the 35,000 other food workers, Environmental Health offers weekly training classes where materials and tests are offered in seven different languages.

## Program Highlight

### Audiovisual Training and Public Information

Environmental Health recognizes the effectiveness of audio and visual training. "Food Safety is in Your Hands," a 7 minute video on hand washing and no bare-hand contact with ready-to-eat food, was produced with a FDA grant. The video, translated into Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean, Vietnamese, and Russian, is used in food safety training locally, statewide, and nationally. The video can also be seen on the web at [www.metrokc.gov/health/foodsfty](http://www.metrokc.gov/health/foodsfty).

**"I'm service oriented, and Environmental Health is about providing a service, problem solving, and making a difference."**

*Jane Bjorkman, Public Health Administrative Services  
Supervisor, Food & Facility Protection Program, 30 years*

Our Civic Television show, "Spotlight on Environmental Health," featured two food safety shows in 2003. "Food Safety at Home" focused on home kitchens, because more than 50% of all food-borne illnesses are associated with home food preparation. We demonstrated safe food practices from grocery shopping to meal preparation. "Food Safety at Parties" was produced especially for the holiday season. The program showed how to safely bring food to a party, serve food on a buffet, and take home leftovers.

## Quick Facts

- Permitted 9,629 food service establishments
- Provided 21,271 inspection and educational visits
- Conducted 86 foodborne illness investigations
- Trained 1/3 of the food protection program staff on inspection standardization
- Trained 35,000 food workers on food safety
- Reviewed 807 kitchen designs for food service establishments
- Responded to 996 public concerns about restaurant food safety
- Produced and distributed 10,000 newsletters to restaurants

## Types of Permitted Food Facilities

